Harold Weisberg
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2/8/73

Dear Diane,

If there is one thing I've learned about you over the years, it is not to be surprized at the surprising. This time I'd have to admit I was. Your letter of the second got here today and it did surprize. I expected something wrong from your long silence and the returned letter, but not a chapter from a grim novella.

I'd like to be bright and cheery after getting it, but in all honesty I can't be. It is a grim story. A certain amount of discounting would still leave it pretty bleak.

If I have no first-hand experience with the hostelries such as you enjoy, I've had some pretty graphic accounts of the accomodations, cuisuine and other patrons -first-hand accounts. I know someone whose son faced 18 years for a single joint, so I know something about the modern attitudes that have prevailed in the legal thinking and enactment.

But the first consideration is the what-to-do department, and there I think health comes first. If you can do nothing else, you should take this up with your lawyer, of whom you seem to think well. How did you get him?

Then you should attempt to communicate with him about the bond you say you can make. Both can be in the same letter.

Meanwhile, to keep yourself busy, make out like you at a female Ivan Denisovich. I once told you to practise expressing yourself and to try to be natural in it. What better time? No Holden Caulfield, just like it is, in full.

Before I forget, let me know what you need that you can have and I can send. Paper? Envelopes? Stamps? Pens or pencils? Regulations vary, so if you'd like anything less than the Brooklyn Bridge, let me know what you want, if it is in accord with the regulations, and how the regulations prescribe sending it.

When you told me about the laughing boy, I was reminded of what happened to Barbara once. That made me wonder how and how long you knew him. There seemed to be nobody when you phoned me. Your other friend Harold, who I met when he had a beard, told me he was satisfied somebody did it to Barbara, and we both had a candidate.

While my mind is going back, you mention writing to a box. Years ago I knew of such a box, close to yours in number then. If it has changed in recent years, I have no way of knowing. Were I to do it today, I'd add one. Were I to offer to do if for you, I do not think it would be helpful to you.

I don't know how to counsel you on this, but from the little I know I'd build no hopes and if your lawyer can't do anything, I'd try.

You've heard about 20-20 hindsight. Looking that way is always easier and clearer. As I look that way now I see so many avoided and unanswered questions the answers to which it would now be good to know. It limits what I can comprehend and can believe, as I think you can understand.

From what you say of the attitude of your folks, I'd encourage you not to do or say anything that can make them feel more righteous. With your record over the years, from their point of view, they have had it. I see things differently. I think I told you about the call I once made to your father and his response when I offered to meet him at the airport and arranged my schedule to have two hours for this.And about Tommy, with whom I was when he spoke to you by phone. Don't precipitate more of a rupture with them than there is now.

What is meant by the nickname "Disconnected Texas Connection"? Sounds serious.

Do they have a Public Defender system down there? Have you tried getting in touch with the ACLU? Aside from medical help, your next pressing need is legal, and if Scott can't push without fee, perhaps a Public Defender system would pay him. From what you say, I think it is not impossible that they might try to help. I can speak to their people up here, but there I know nobody. If you want me to, tell me. And be sure you throw no curves, at me or the dykes. Some places the local Legal Aid Society helps in cases like yours. One in a distant city, not your home, was recently in touch with me on behalf of a prisoner I was able to help. I'll do whatever I can, but I don't think I should do anything without word from you.

Have you had any kind of medical examination since injury? Your old stitch-marks that I remember, without any new ones, should have been enough to persuade the unpersuadable that there is something serious below the skin.To say nothing of the grafts.

It is never easy for most people to be patient and it was always less easy for you to be. Yet I would impress upon you the importance of it now. Try to curb the rashness with which I am familiar. It could be very counterproductive.

I do have knowledge of some of the normal hazards in environments such as yours, from some of the guests. I also know some of the things very easily rigged, so be as careful as you can without getting paranoid.

I'll enclose a stamped envelop and hope it is not contrary to regulations there.

I am really serious about encouraging you to use the time you now have to practise writing, in the manner that is natural for you, as you talk. Don't worry about the spelling and don't try to make up a new style. Concentrate instead on what you want to say, and don't jazz that up, either. You'll find it was as I counselled you it would be when you were in college in N.O. Maybe the form of a long short story would be best, but tell it as it is, not fancifully. Maybe when you see Scott he could be interested in your fledgling literary talents. Maybe he'd even want me to edit it. Who knows. But try.And it should help you pass the time.

Don't give a second thought to Big Jim. You never understood the relationship between him and me. Maybe you listened to the wrong people? I haven't heard fom him in a long time and right now he has plenty of his own troubles. He'll be lucky to survive them and himself.

There are many cliches I'd like to be able to utter but I can t because your situation is not good and you'd know it would be false cheering-up, which is no way to cheer anybody up. The only ways are to encourage them not to do anything that might make bad into worse and to try and keep a cool, thinking head in the face of countless things all of which make it hard to control onesself and to be at all collected. You will find that the best chance of relief comes with coping, or at least with trying to cope. Sometimes even going by the book works.I know a man who has two bum raps against him. He has been patient and gone by the book and he is getting a parole on one and has a lawyer on the other. If his lawyer does a good job, I think the man will walk. Yet he faced 50 years. So, don't give up hope and don't panic. Take each day as it comes and try to make the best of each, one at a time. And try to be as explicit as you can in what you'd like me to try to do. I can't guarantee nay more than that I'll try. Pending hearing from you, there is one thing I'll do. There is a lawyer I trust who will be here soon. I'll ask him to read your letter and see if he has anyideas. He is solid and trustworthy and he may know somebody down there.

If you are allowed to have a radio and don't have one, let me know. I have a little 9-volt transistor set I'm not using. It is not a particularly good one, but it might be some company. How about books?

Reminds me, as you would not know: some jails have good chaplains. Have you tried that? I once knew one. Great guy.

Let mek hear from you when you can. Until then my best,

sincerely,